

“A New Beginning”
by Rev. Frances Savill
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Easter Sunday

John 20:1-18

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Easter is one of the foundations of our faith. Jesus is risen – he is risen indeed. The tomb is empty – death is defeated. Easter is God’s thunderous “Amen” to life and death of Jesus.

At the cross we heard Jesus’ cry; “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And we wondered if Jesus was in fact God forsaken.

This morning, we have come to the wondrous news that Jesus is risen. God raised him from the dead – God had not forsaken Jesus - he has triumphed through the cross.

And for a few minutes this morning I invite you to listen carefully and place yourself in the story that John talks about this great glad news.

“It was the first day of the week.” What else happened in the beginning on the first day? (*God created the heavens and the earth*). “In the beginning was the Word”- was how John’s gospel began back in chapter 1.

“Early in the morning, on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...” A lot happens in John’s gospel in the dark – Judas went out into the dark to betray Jesus, part of Jesus’ trial happened at night.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” (John 12-35-36)

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.” (John 1:5) “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb”. (John 20:1)

Do you see how John is setting us up to think of a new beginning? It is as if Mary and all of us are at the beginning of a new creation... a new day is about to be revealed. Mary doesn’t know it yet, but we know.

Mary has gone to the tomb to mourn. And when she gets to the tomb, she finds it empty. She immediately goes to the disciples. Peter and the beloved disciple – go back to the tomb with her to confirm her witness. And they find everything just as she said.

Mary had assumed that the grave had been robbed, or that Jesus’ body had been taken away by his enemies. But what we find in the tomb doesn’t add up to that - the grave clothes were there, the cloth from his face by itself.

Neither Jesus' enemies nor grave robbers would have taken the time to unwrap the body, and they would have stolen the grave clothes.

The one called the beloved disciple believed – though he did not understand fully, he already began to believe. He and Peter left the tomb, the two disciples went their own ways.

Mary was left there – probably bewildered, still weeping, not only was her beloved teacher dead, but now his body was missing- and then she looked in the tomb. Angels appeared to her – they asked her – “Woman why are you weeping?”

We understand Mary's weeping. Most of have, and all of us will go to the grave of someone we love and weep. And until we know that Jesus is risen from the dead there is nothing to do except weep.

The Apostle Paul says, “We (who know Christ is raised) do not mourn as those who have no hope.” At this point Mary has no hope. Her Lord, her hope, her beloved teacher, the one who gave her life and set her free, was dead. And until she encounters the risen Lord Jesus there is no hope, there is only weeping.

Then Mary turned around. The Lord was so near, and she didn't know it. Then Jesus spoke to her. His words are very similar to the first words he spoke to the disciples - “What are you looking for?” To Mary his question is “Whom are you looking for?” The disciples asked Jesus where he was staying – and Jesus responded to them; “Come and see”. It was an invitation to a relationship and a whole new life. To Mary Jesus simply spoke her name: “Mary.” And hearing her name she recognized Jesus.

We might wonder why Mary didn't recognize Jesus at first. She wasn't looking for Jesus alive – she was searching for his lifeless body. She wouldn't even have considered it could be Jesus.

And it seems that his disciples are kept from recognizing Jesus until he reveals himself to them. But when Jesus spoke her name, suddenly her eyes were opened, and she recognized Jesus.

And Jesus' words were fulfilled – he calls his sheep by name; they recognize his voice and follow him (Jn. 10:3).

This is a wonderful scene of intimacy and joy. Mary responds, "Rabbouni" Beloved teacher. In Mary's eyes things are as they were – her beloved teacher has returned; all is as it was.

But all is not as it was! All is new, there is a new relationship that is beginning – Jesus is being raised to his Father, and so a new relationship is beginning. Jesus isn't staying with Mary as her teacher. He is being raised and the disciples are now named as Jesus' brothers. And God is not just Jesus' Father, but he is their God and their Father. All is being made new.

Where are they? (*In a garden - like the first creation*)

On the first day of the week, while it was still dark, and then the light of the new day began to dawn, and Mary saw her Lord when he spoke her name and new life began. A new creation is beginning, new hope, a new start, the story of God's salvation is just beginning.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. Mary did as Jesus asked her – she was the first witness – she ran and told the disciples – I have seen the Lord! Then she told them all that had happened.

"I have seen the Lord!"

I pray this morning you will hear the Lord speak your name and you will know that he is risen and present here. I pray that you will know that new life, a new start, a new day, a new hope is offered this day in Jesus' name. And I pray that you will be his witnesses.

"I have seen the Lord!"

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Prayer:

This morning Lord, we listen for your voice speaking our name. Open our eyes to your risen presence with us here. May we know the joy of your resurrection and go from here celebrating the good glad news that we have seen the Lord.

Amen.